

This column will tell story of our rich, varied history

This is the first of a weekly column that will tell the story of Helena's past. Helenans are fortunate to be literally surrounded by its rich and varied history. Other than the stories of the city's west side mansions, millionaires, downtown area and the gold rush days, the history of Helena has been virtually untouched. A team of six Helena historians has assembled to research and write of events, people and places that have made Helena what it is today. Some of the stories will be amusing and others sad; the majority will fall somewhere in-between. In the process, we hope to set the record straight on what happened in the "Queen City of Rockies" and to its people, giving our readers a feeling for what it was like to live here from the early 1860s until the present.

Some of the topics addressed will include the city's ethnic groups, fraternal societies, Helena politicism, personalities, churches, and significant events. Although an isolated frontier community, Helena influenced many national events. Some columns will be topical. For instance, 1994 marks the centennial of the fight between Copper Kings William A. Clark and Marcus Daly over the location of the state capital. Other subjects will include prominent local families, "true" Helena ghost stories, epidemics, and the red light district to name but a few. We will also spread out into the county to discuss many important people and events that helped shaped the community. We will take a look at the area's historic roads and bridges to document their contribution to the development of the area.

Because Helenans are constantly exposed to its history by the hundreds of historic buildings and structures still standing in the city, historic preservation issues will also be addressed in the columns. This will, hopefully, educate our readers to the stories our old buildings have to tell and how they reflect the times in which they were constructed. Each building tells a story of the optimism and hope Helena's early citizens had in the expanding community. Helena's built environment provides the most tangible reminder of the city's heritage and the people who comprise it.

The column will also report on the efforts of various groups in the community who are working to preserve the history of Helena and Lewis and Clark County for present and future generations. Both the Helena-Lewis and Clark County Historic Preservation Commission and the Lewis and Clark County Historical Society are devotedly involved in a number of activities dedicated to the preservation of Helena's and Lewis and Clark County's history.

Writers of the column will include Richard Roeder, Chere Juisto, Dave Walter, Ellen Baumler, Leann Kurtz and Jon Axline. Each will bring their professional experience, enthusiasm and varied interest in the subject to the IR. Because of our diverse interests, the articles will be distinct and include topics not always included in newspaper historical columns. Who know? They may generate controversy, disprove some cherished legends or create new traditions for the Helena community. We do promise they will never be dull and will, hopefully, inspire curiosity and, with any luck, further research in Helena's history.

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